

"Dear Mr. President", Nashville, Tennessee, January or February 1942

AFS 6443B

Lewis Jones: Well, Gilchreist what did you start to say?

Will Gilchreist: Well as I said before I'm behind the president and his war effort a hundred percent. But there are some things that it being said that's detrimental to the cause. Now over the radio station here, every day the announcer says that they want marines, and in the end he says they must be white. They used to say that, but they don't say it anymore, but it's all the same. Negroes really can't get in it. And when I hear Mr. Russell over there said that he has a son in the navy and that he's behind it one hundred percent, and that he is advancing, it's pitiful because he can't advance far.

And then there's Mr. Shook. He's figuring that the Negro has been oppressed. Mr. Thomas figures the Negroes haven't been given a chance in labor and Mr. Beesley says that it's a threefold fact. But I disagree with all of them so far as the war is concerned right now, I don't think now's the time for that. I think the main thing that we should do is to everybody get in there and fight and win the war. And if the Negro does his part I believe he will get his share.

Harold Thomas: Mr. Gilchreist you said just now that you didn't think now was the time. I think that right now is the time. You should hit while the iron is hot. If we don't get anything now there's no way for us to get it later. And what we're getting now we want to see to it that we can hold after the war is over. That's my attitude.

Will Gilchreist: It seems to me like Mr. Thomas is like a man that has a friend and he gets sick and down and out and he jumps on him with both feet when he really needs help. We don't have no time now for argument. We've got to fight and win the war and then we can settle all of this.

Unidentified Man: Mr. Gilchreist, in answer to Mr. Thomas, I agree Mr. Thomas for this reason. This isn't the first time or this isn't the first time we've been sick. So if you keep on getting sick and you keep on sending aid both of you will be sick. So therefore why not now make provisions to look after all groups.

I don't think that, back to the labor unions, I don't think that the contractors or the head official will be doing the Negro so much a favor as to what is due him since we pay taxes and are natural born citizens more so. More so, why shouldn't we share all of the rights?

Mr. Gilchreist: I didn't say that it was right. I have never said that. I told you in the first place that they don't even allow Negroes to join the marines. I know that's not right. I'm against that. But, I said now we can't stop to argue about nothing. We've got to go in here and fight.

Unidentified man: Mr. Gilchreist, don't you feel that the Negro have capabilities that should allow him to participate in any branch of the service? And if allowed to participate in any branch of the service, he would be of much more service to the country than he would if he was segregated against and continued to fight in the parts of the service in which he doesn't feel that he wants to fight and naturally can't fight as well as he would if he was fighting in the service that he thought he was best suited for?

Unidentified man: And also, Mr. Gilchreist since we're on this labor union here at home, this home defense. Why shouldn't we be able to make the same money to buy defense bonds and help if we can't actually participate in the war why not buy bonds and do other things that would help our sons who are abroad to carry this war on to a finish.

Mr. Gilchreist: Well, as I said, I still say that I know that we should be hired in the industries. But we can't stop work while we argue. We can argue and then work too. We should go into it a hundred percent working and then the president, he has a duty. He knows and I think he has influence. He can see to it, I don't want you to get the wrong idea now that I'm for the discrimination. I know doggone good and well that we should get a share in it and I think we will. But I think to be antagonistic won't help any. I believe we should go forward and do all we can for this thing.